Having thus regained my good health, I set about considering the power of temperance. If it was able to cure the countless ills that had been tormenting me, it must also have the power to keep me in good health, strengthen my poor constitution and my delicate stomach. I therefore set about diligently studying whether the foods I found so agreeable were also agreeable to my stomach, and to find out if the saying I feared was true and is universally believed, that is, whatever pleases the palate, must agree with the stomach, or, that whatever is palatable must be wholesome and nourishing. I found it to be false for I soon found that many of the things I found so agreeable, such as sharp, cold wine, melons and other fruit, salads, fish, pork, cakes, legume soups, pasta dishes and the like, were actually causing me great harm. On the basis of this experience I therefore stopped eating those foods and drinking cold wines, and chose wines that agreed more with my stomach, limiting myself to quantities I knew my body could cope with. I did the same with food, both regarding its quality and quantity, making sure I never left the table full of either food or drink, but with the sensation that I could still eat or drink some more, in accordance with the saying that to consult his health, a man must check his appetite. I therefore managed to overcome intemperance and thus devoted my life to a temperate and regular life, the result being, as already mentioned, that within just one year, all the ailments that had been afflicting me and had seemed incurable had disappeared. It had another positive effect, which was that I no longer fell ill each year as I had done when I had eaten and drunk with such excess and had suffered from a strange fever, that sometimes took me almost to death's door.

I was also freed from this, and became exceedingly healthy and remain so until this day. The only reason for this is that not once have I transgressed against moderation and regularity. As a result, the food I have always eaten and the wine I have drunk have only been those that agree with my constitution and in the amounts it can bear so that they left behind no ill. Thus, living in this fashion I have always enjoyed (God be praised), the best of health. It is also true that in addition to the aforementioned rules I adopt in food and drink, and which are of the utmost importance, that is, not to eat
anything my stomach is unable to digest and to eat only those things that agree with me, I have also been careful not to suffer from excessive heat or cold, tire myself excessively, sleep regularly, avoid excessive sexual intercourse, stuffy rooms, the wind and sun. It is not very difficult to guard oneself against these ills, since a reasonable man prefers life and good health to something that causes him ill.

Comments

We cannot agree with our author when he says there is absolutely no foundation to the saying that “the foods we like are nourishing” for foods that are tasty can upset the stomach and produce bad humours rather than nourish. I believe that such negative effects are the result of intemperance since it is particularly difficult to exercise moderation when agreeable, tasty food is before one, something that applies in general and not just to food. The same can be said of sexual activity which, as Celsus says, “If done in moderation is good for the body, if done in excess, it results in bodily ruin”. It is certainly no coincidence that nature made sure the tongue and palate are so delicate. It was done so that both men and animals can distinguish between what is healthy and what is harmful. More than once, in his work De Simp. Med. Facultatibus, Galen writes that it is thanks to taste and smell that we can recognize the particular characteristics of plants. I am constantly amazed how oxen, horses and other animals are able to recognize the smell of a harmful weed and refuse it when you give them a handful of grass. In the same manner, when we smell something horrible or taste something bitter, our stomach reacts immediately and induces vomiting. And this occurs in the healthy because in the ill we can observe the very opposite. They are more averse to what is good and appetizing and prefer unhealthy things. This must be related to the changes in the digestive apparatus and the stomach in particular. Anything that stimulates the sense of taste must therefore be considered with moderation. It cannot be said that there is no food that is both appetizing but not nutritious and at times poisonous. There is the example of the mushroom species Pliny calls “pleasant poison”, which can kill entire families and ravage an entire banquet if eaten. One can say that what is pleasing to the palate is
welcomed by and agreeable to the stomach. An example of this is to be found during the summer when the acidic foods we long for actually encourage the acidic secretion of the stomach which the bile, predominant in that season, tries to impede. Whereas in the winter, sweet and aromatic foods and wines alleviate the excessive acidity of the ferment by restoring the right degree of sweetness. Those who wish to live long and healthily should pay attention to a great many things and not just moderate the quantity and quality of their diet. These include excessive exertion, their homes, unhealthy air, the winds, exposure to the sun, all situations which our author thinks every free man will have no difficulty in guarding himself against. The place one spends most of one’s time is of particular importance. The air of Beotia had a terrible reputation, while that of Crotone was good, hence the saying: “healthier than Crotone”. Indeed, inhabitants live longer in places where the air is clean since it enters the body via the skin, a phenomenon that led Hippocrates (Liber de flatibus) to describe air as the “author and regulator” of everything that takes place in our body. Physical exercise might produce contrasting effects; if done in moderation it invigorates, while if done in excess, it exhausts. Celsus makes a similar observation regarding massage. The wind is nothing other than a violent movement of the air from the ocean. In the places the whole mass of humours does not reach, it moves up and down. The sun’s rays have a negative influence on the whole body but on the head in particular, above all in the summer. Great attention should be paid to Hippocrates when he says: “during the summer you should walk slowly, unless you are under the sun”; the reason is clear – due to the motion and reflections, the rays are less intense.
I have also taken as much care as possible to guard myself against those evils we cannot remove so easily – melancholy and hate, and other violent emotions, which seem to exert great power over our bodies. I have not been able to guard myself from all these ills as it was impossible to avoid suffering from them every now and then. However, I have learned that if one respects the two rules of eating and drinking, the harm they cause is not all that great. Galen, who was such a great doctor, was one of the first to recognize this when he said that as long as he respected these two rules, he suffered little harm from the others, and then only for one day at the most. I am a living witness of what he said and those who know me have seen me exposed to the heat and cold and unpleasant changes in the weather without suffering in the least. Likewise, they have also seen me greatly disturbed owing to various vicissitudes I suffered but even these caused me no ill while the opposite was the case for those who followed a life of excess and intemperance. Amongst these was a brother of mine and other relatives who trusted in their constitution and did not follow my example. Their grief and dejection was such when they saw me involved in expensive lawsuits brought against me by rich and powerful men, that they were overcome with terrible melancholy in their fear that I should be ruined. It had such influence over their intemperate bodies that they died before their time; whereas I suffered not at all as I had no superfluous humours in me. On the contrary, to keep up my spirits I convinced myself that God had allowed these lawsuits against me in order to make me more aware of the strength of my body and mind, and that I should beat them with my honour and advantage, which is what happened. For in the end, I was victorious, in both fortune and character, and thus suffered no ill. One can therefore see that those who live a life that is both sober and regular, will suffer no bodily harm from either melancholy or any other emotion.

Comments

Just to what extent anxiety can affect the body is also shown
by the fact that it becomes evident in the face with characteristic colours. As we can read in Cambreo (Liber de passionum characteribus), this occurs during the emotions of love, hate, fear, anger, hope, sudden joy and many other feelings. Many other authors have given exemplary stories on this topic of sudden cases of death caused by a violent outburst of rage, fear, or unexpected joy. There are some stoics amongst philosophers who sought apathy by training their mind to remain unperturbed by unexpected events. Thus, when he was being sent to death, to be beaten in a mortar, Anacardi said to his executioners: "You can beat the body but you will never be able to beat the soul". According to Cicero (de finibus bonorum), when afflicted by pain, Epicureanists, who all sought pleasure and favoured indolence, would say, "If the pain is great, it will not last long, if it lasts long, it cannot be serious". Seneca rightly censured Democritus who ridiculed everything and Heraclitus who did nothing but waste away because of human misery: "Taking the suffering of others upon one's shoulders means living in continuous misery, but it is inhumane to laugh at the troubles of others". Any extreme behaviour is to be avoided and one should find the correct balance, not just regarding the misfortune of others but also one's own, whether regarding the body or spirit. In Consolation at Polibio Seneca writes: "It is not human to remain insensitive to one's ills, being unable to bear them means lacking in courage". One therefore needs to be able to control one's emotions if one's health is not to be affected considerably, or rather, so it is harmed as little as possible. Our author rightly says that those who live a sober life are in the best conditions to avoid any serious harm that is usually the result of emotions, while the same does not apply to those who live a life of excess. His writing is the fruit of personal experience. The suffering caused by personal vicissitudes must have been considerable since one of his brothers died while he survived the very same illness, and as a result he became convinced that the path of a sober life was one that had to be followed.
But I shall go one step further and say that such ill and pain cannot be afflicted on those who live a temperate life. I myself experienced this when I was seventy. As was my habit, I was in a coach that was travelling quite fast when by some unlucky turn of fate it overturned, and I was pulled a considerable distance by the horses before they could be stopped. Not only did I receive many shocks and bruises to my head and all over my body but I also dislocated both a leg and arm. Once I had been taken back home, the doctors were summoned immediately and when they arrived and saw what a terrible state I was in, and at such an age, they said I would die within three days, despite the two cures they wanted to administer. One was to let my blood, the other to give me purgatives to stop the humours from being affected and to stop a raging fever or inflammation. I, on the contrary, knew that the regular life I had been following for years meant my humours were healthy and would not change, so I refused to have my blood drawn or to take any other medicine. The only thing I let them do was to set my leg and arm, and let myself be massaged as they said it was appropriate in such a case. Thus, without resorting to any other remedy, just as I had imagined, I was cured and suffered no further ill or alteration, which the doctors regarded as no less than a miracle. One must therefore draw the conclusion that those who live a life that is regular and sober and not intemperate, will suffer little from other ailments and accidents.

Comments

The case our author describes from his own experience is highly illustrative for practical medicine. Travelling by coach, it overturns because the horses are galloping too fast; at seventy years old, he finds himself with a head injury, a dislocated arm and an injury to a leg. The doctors therefore order blood-letting which he refuses, and he then recovers completely. In cases such as these doctors usually err because whenever they have an injured person before them, either the result of falling from a height, dislocation, or frac-
tures they immediately prescribe blood-letting indiscriminately and if they do not, they feel guilty. In actual fact, a prudent doctor should not consider blood-letting before seeing to the dislocation or setting the fracture and immobilizing the fractured limb correctly, especially if the patient in question is healthy and leads a life that is ruled by moderation. Our author was right to take the decision upon himself and refuse blood-letting. This was because he knew his body was not plethoric and the body fluids had not been affected thanks to his lifestyle, which had kept both at bay. It should also be remembered that when effects are the result of an external cause, such as in injury or falling from a height, with dislocations or the like, the body has to be in perfect health and without humours, and able to mobilize itself. Indeed, it is often the case that someone dies because of a small wound while another recovers from a much more serious one. In the case of the former this is due to the poor latent condition of the body, while in the second, it is due to the good condition of the humours. What Hippocrates wrote on the subject is extremely interesting (V. Epidemiorum): “Nereo had a beautiful daughter who was playing one day with a young friend when the latter struck her on the head. She was immediately overcome with dizziness and fainted. Once she had been taken home, a raging fever set in, her head ached and her face was turgid. She died on the ninth day”. The comment Vallesio wrote on this passage is extremely useful. On the subject of those who die following a slight fever or contusion, Hippocrates writes (Liber de Cap. Vuln.): “These subjects do not die because of this cause, even if death is sudden”. The phenomenon can certainly not be caused by the injury alone, but it is understandable if the poor condition of the body is taken into consideration. Hence, the person who causes that kind of injury cannot be accused of murder. See Paolo Zacchia (Quest. Medico-Legal.) for more on this subject.
However, from my recent experience, I once again came to the conclusion that excesses in eating and drinking prove fatal. Already four years have passed since I decided to follow the doctors' advice and that of my friends and relatives, and increase the amount of food I was eating but this reduced me to mortal infirmity. I would now like to explain the reasons so others might benefit from my experience.

Seeing I was eating so little, together with the doctors, my closest relatives and friends, who are all extremely fond of me, told me that the amount I was eating was not sufficient for someone of my age since I not only had to preserve my strength, but also increase it. And the only way to do this was by eating in larger quantities. I, however, was convinced that nature was content with little, and that this small quantity had kept me in good health and active for a great number of years. I also believed that as a man grows older, his stomach becomes weaker and one should therefore decrease and not increase the amount one eats. I therefore saw absolutely no need to increase the amount I was eating and to support my reasons I reminded them of two proverbs that are true. One is that he who wishes to eat a lot, should eat just little. The reason for this is that eating little prolongs one's life and, a long life means one eats a lot. The second proverb is that what we leave after an abundant meal does us more good than what we have eaten.

Comments

It is my firm belief that during the course of an illness a diet should be rigorously followed. This is even truer if the illness is acute. I also believe that even the slightest variation, whether an increase or decrease in the quantities of food to be eaten, can have serious effects. In a state of so-called equilibrium, one that is neither good health nor illness, it is therefore likely that that balance will be upset after following a liberal diet and this will result in illness. It should be pointed out that it is not at all easy to make someone in good health observe strict rules, and this would not
be particularly good for society either. It suffices to ask an elderly person who has already earned his reward by offering society the best years of his life. It would be incorrect to expect the younger generation and especially those of particular status and in perfect health to respect these rules. How could a soldier carry out his duties, an ambassador bear the strain of a long journey, or a public man carry out his duties in his homeland? How could a doctor visit all his patients at home and how could a lawyer do everything required of him in his profession? “He will rise with the birds to open the door to those seeking advice”. Is it possible for these people to carry out their tasks while following such a rigorously reduced diet? What Celsus says on the subject is interesting: “Those who are healthy in body and mind cannot be forced to endure any kind of restriction”. Let us therefore leave those who are healthy alone and make sure convalescents and those suffering from a serious illnesses respect such rules; in other words, paying careful attention to the quantity, moderation and quality of their diet. What Hippocrates wrote to such effect on this subject should be mentioned (3. in Primo Epid.): “The daughter of Philo ate food when she should not have, and died”. The observation commonly made by surgeons when treating injuries is also noteworthy – they understand whether the patient has strayed from the diet he was meant to follow by the amount of pus in the wound.
However, my arguments and proverbs were to no avail and they would not let me be. Thus, not wanting to appear obstinate or to know better than the doctors themselves, and above all to please my family, I increased my quantity of food by just two ounces. So whereas previously I had been eating bread, an egg yolk, meat and soup for a total weight of twelve ounces, I increased it to fourteen ounces and increased the amount of wine I drink from fourteen to sixteen ounces. Within just ten days, this increase had such a terrible effect on me that whereas previously I had been cheerful, I was now melancholy and bad-tempered and nothing could please me. On the twelfth day I was afflicted by a terrible pain in my side that lasted twenty-two hours and this was followed by a fever that lasted thirty-five hours both day and night so I was unable to sleep for even a minute. Everyone looked upon me as a dead man. But God be praised I recovered thanks to my temperance, although I was seventy-eight, emaciated and it was one of the coldest winters in memory. I am convinced I escaped death only thanks to the temperate lifestyle I had been following for years, during which I had only suffered from one or two days’ illness at the most. Temperate living for so many years meant there was no excess or malignancy in my humours as is the case in the aged bodies of those who have followed a life of intemperance. There is no malignancy in my humours, which is what kills men, but only that new one caused by this new increase which was not strong enough to kill me.

This was the only reason I was alive – temperate living being the source of health and long life – despite the ailments that caused me such terrible infirmity in such a brief time, it was the sober and temperate life that had kept me healthy for so many years. Thus, it is logical that if temperance is exerted in the world, the body remains healthy, and just as the four elements affect our bodies, so does intemperance. Order makes an army victorious and order preserves the Cities, Families and Kingdoms themselves. Orderly living is therefore one of the most certain causes and foundations of a long and healthy life. One can even say that it is the only true medicine and those who reflect upon this carefully will agree. Thus, when a doctor goes to visit a patient, the first thing he prescribes is regular living;
Thus when the patient recovers he should continue along this path if he wants to remain healthy. And there is no doubt that if he does so, he will no longer fall ill, because he has removed all the causes of the ill so he will no longer need either doctors or medicine.

Comments

Our author rightly claims that once a person abandons a healthy lifestyle and diet, he will certainly feel the effects. Good health is restored by returning to that path, and readopting the rules and diet that had been abandoned. Our temperament is influenced directly by the humours, just as the harmony and equilibrium of the various temperaments depend on the humours. Galen believes that the human soul is nothing other than the result of a particular kind of equilibrium. Plato wrote that health represents the harmony between body and soul and that the relationship between these two is such that if the soul prevails, the body suffers and falls ill, whereas if the body prevails, the soul is injured and becomes despondent. Both Firmiamo Lattanzio and Cassiodorus wrote a great deal that deserves to be read on the marvellous, harmonious relationship between the various parts of the human body and those that are commonly called pudenda and are kept hidden, making them no less beautiful or useful. What is it that sculptors never cease to admire in that statue of Polykleitus if not the perfect harmony of the proportions of the body parts? In De Civitate Dei, Liber 22 Saint Augustine wrote that the most beautiful parts of the body are those that cannot be seen: “If one were able to admire the beauty within the human body that corresponds perfectly to what the Greeks call harmony, our mind would be greatly satisfied to appreciate them more than those parts we can usually see”. The only way to respect this aesthetic tenet, whether the one corresponding to the external parts or the internal parts of man is the much extolled sober living.
If the patient were to follow my advice, he would become his own doctor and indeed, he would be the best he could have since no man should be a perfect doctor to any but himself. This is because with experience, each man gets to know his own constitution perfectly and knows which food and wine agrees with his stomach. It is impossible to know such things about another, things which one has difficulty discovering about oneself and which require time and experience, and such experience is more than necessary because the nature and stomachs of men differ more than their very appearances. Who would have ever thought that old wine disagreed with me but new wine did not? And that pepper, that renowned hot spice had no warming effect on me, any more than warmed cinnamon? Which doctor would have been able to warn me of these hidden characteristics since I myself had great difficulty in discovering them myself? Therefore, it is impossible to be a perfect doctor to someone else. Since man is his own best doctor and a temperate life is the best medicine, these are to be embraced.

Comments

The perfect doctor does therefore not exist and there is not even the hope he might be born in the future. With great candour Hippocrates himself wrote (Ep. ad Demo.) that, although he was old, he did not consider himself a perfect doctor. Galen (Method., III) explains this – the doctor does not have perfect knowledge of the nature and character of men. Indeed, he says, "If I could explore the nature of any detail completely, I would raise myself to the heights that I think can only be attributed to Asclepius". How many of those, known as poliatri, who are experts in the theory and burdens of experience, can actually claim they know the nature and characteristics of each patient, perhaps without ever having seen them before? Celsus (in Prae.) rightly claimed that a doctor who already knows the patient is more useful than one who sees him for the first time. In view of this diversity of nature and character, our author rightly comes to the following conclu-
Notes on the Sober Life - there is no better doctor than oneself. On the basis of vast experience, he is able to distinguish what is good and what is bad for him. According to Tacitus (Annales, VI), Tiberius Nero had no great faith in medicine and considered it a waste of time to seek its advice, until he was thirty at least.

In reference to a particular condition of his body, the author tells us that any wine over a year old harmed him considerably while young wines agreed with him. It therefore follows that in both health and illness, food that is identified with the most appropriate criteria is useful both in prevention and medical treatment. I am convinced that Asclepiades of Prusa remained in perfect health until he was old by resorting to no other remedy than the rigorous rules of a temperate life and, as Pliny says (Book VII, ch. 37), “He had made a deal with fortune – he would not turn to any doctor unless he himself knew he was ill”. According to Pliny (Book XXXVI), he had questioned the entire field of traditional medicine and refused any medicinals, thus starting a new therapeutic method based on fasting, abstaining from wine, massages, physical exercise and the like. Similarly, we can read in Galen (V. De San. Tuen) that Antiochus, a great believer in the sober life, lived to a ripe old age and when he became infirm, to nourish the flame of life that required constant support, “He would eat three times a day, bread with Attic honey at eight or nine in the morning; at midday or one o’clock he would have a light lunch, beginning with some jujubes to help the digestion, he preferred fish to meat, in particular the one known as mullet that lives in the high seas; at dinner he would abstain from fish and only eat tasty food that was not susceptible to putrefaction”. It is difficult to understand why this doctor went against ancient habits and ate more for lunch than for dinner. At this point we should read the testimony by G. Langio (Epist. Med. Libro primo Epis. LV) in which he presents various arguments in favour of the fact that, even today, dinner should be more abundant than lunch. At a certain point the author also mentions the story of the doctor Antiochus, saying that old age, in particular when very advanced, should be considered by the same standards as a disease, and that its treatment must therefore be the opposite of the one adopted in patients who are robust and healthy.
However, I am not trying to say that a doctor should not be summoned for the knowledge and treatment of diseases that afflict those who lead an intemperate life. For if it brings great comfort that a friend visits you while ill simply to express his sorrow for your ills and to comfort you, how much more comfort will it bring if that person is a doctor who wants to restore your health? However, if one wishes to stay in good health, I believe that the doctor to be summoned is a temperate life which, as one can see, is our true medicine and one that is extolled by the learned and sought for by many. Furthermore, it is not a gold potion or “Elisir vitae”, or whatever other name one wishes to give it, that these curious investigators of the occult are seeking, but a temperate life that gives these much coveted results, because it preserves men, even those of a sickly constitution, keeping them healthy until they are a hundred or more, and it prevents them from dying of infirmity or corruption of the humours, but they simply die of natural decay, which awaits everyone in the end. This is the gold or “Elisir” so many have been searching for but which so few have actually tried.

Comments

In (Epistola LXXVIII. ad Lucillium) Seneca describes the violent and lengthy flux that had afflicted him and made him weak and gaunt, saying that whilst he was in that predicament, his friends were of great comfort to him. He says, “With their recommendations and encouragement, my friends were the reason my health was restored as their comfort did my body good”. During the healing process, the doctor plays a decisive role if he is a trustworthy friend. Indeed, as Seneca (4. Contr.) himself says, nothing is more beneficial to a patient than being treated by someone they trust. A patient’s trust is more effective than any medicine. But not everyone is in the condition to be able to choose the doctor they want. For example, this is not the case in religious communities, in particular the poorer ones that have one particular doctor. This then results in discontent because the doctor is not one they trust. There is
nothing more harmful for a patient than a sense of dislike or even aversion towards the doctor looking after him. Since the temperament and natural disposition of men varies so greatly, a doctor who is both careful and a little perceptive should be lenient enough to adapt to the patient's needs and inclinations. Resorting to such behaviour and not just because of their expertise, many doctors are regarded as great authorities and have enjoyed great success. What the famous Gaspar de los Reyes (*Quaestiones*) wrote on the subject is both witty and wise: "It is therefore often the case that ignorant, inexperienced doctors and charlatans have been more successful with the common people than the learned and wise".